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CRITICS CONCEDE GAINS BY KOMER

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Say New Pacification Chief
Is Off to a Good Start

By R. W. APPLE JR.
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SAIGON, South Vietnam, July 9—Critics of Robert W. Komer, the controversial former Presidential assistant, concede that he has accomplished more than they had expected during his first two months in South Vietnam.

A number of officials who threatened to resign when they learned that Mr. Komer was being sent here have not only reconsidered but have become his ardent supporters.

Mr. Komer, whose sometimes abrasive personality earned him the nickname "the Blowtorch," was named Deputy Ambassador on May 11. He was assigned as an aide to Gen. William C. Westmorland, the American military commander, with responsibility for the antiguerrilla pacification drive.

The program is run by the South Vietnamese, with the Americans functioning as advisers and suppliers of logistical assistance. The purpose of the program is to improve living conditions in rural villages in order to win the allegiance of the villages and to make the areas secure from the Vietcong.

Mr. Komer has spent his first eight weeks on the job trying to build a more effective support organization and working out a plan for accelerating the pacification effort. The plan, called Operation Take-off, was presented to Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara but has not been made public.

Substantive Problem Remains

The major test, in the view of most observers, will come when Mr. Komer turns to the substantive problem — getting the Vietnamese Army and civilian officials to do their job with greater efficiency and zeal.

"So far," one former critic remarked, "Komer has not been able to speed up the over-all effort much. But I'm no longer certain he won't be able to. If this organization he has put together can't do it, we ought to quit."

As part of the reorganization, a single American official, either a military officer or a civilian, has been named to oversee the pacification effort in each of the country's 44 provinces and in the cities of Vungtau, Danang and

When the plan was announced, it was predicted that almost all the jobs would go to military men. Pacification experts, who had hoped to combine knowledge of military logistics with the political and economic skill of civilians, were dismayed. Mr. Komer insisted at the time that he would see to it that civilians got at least a third of the jobs.

When the appointments were approved, but not announced, last week, Mr. Komer had his way.

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Of the 47 officials involved, informed sources said, 22 are civilians and 25 are military officers. At the end of July, when two officers end their tours of duty, they will be replaced by civilians, bringing the ratio to 24 to 23.

Less Fight Than Expected

"What surprised me," said one civilian, "is the degree to which the military gave us what we wanted. They put up much less of a fight than I, for one, had expected them to."

Civilians had expected to be told they were unqualified for the key jobs because advisers will, at least in theory, advise Vietnamese provincial chiefs not only on pacification and political issues but also on the deployment of national guards-

men and militiamen. In addition, all but one of the provincial chiefs are themselves soldiers.

A number of civilians with wide experience in Vietnam have been called back to assume the new jobs. The post of adviser in Binh Dinh Province, for example, has been assigned to Chalmers B. Wood, a relatively senior Foreign Service officer who headed the Vietnam task force in the State Department after serving here.

The senior American in each of the corps areas will be a general officer. Mr. Komer is reported to have hoped to name a civilian for the IV Corps out in the Mekong Delta, but no sufficiently qualified man could be found, according to informed sources.

Civilians at Headquarters

Civilians predominate in the offices that have been established in Saigon to oversee the pacification effort. Although the headquar-

moreland's command, there are eight civilians for every soldier.

The changeover was not accomplished without grumbling.

Mr. Komer is reported to have raised his voice more than once to persuade military staff officers to consult him before issuing directives affecting his plans, and some of the officers are resentful of his presence and his power.

More difficulties may come when the pacification unit, which was grafted almost whole onto the military command, tries to absorb some traditional military functions, such as intelligence and psychological warfare.

For the most part, however, observers say Mr. Komer has accomplished the organizational phase of his job well.

"It isn't easy to admit," said a young civilian who had threatened to resign when Mr. Komer's appointment was announced, "but he seems to have brought it off. He does, his homework, he puts in long hours and he'll fight for his ideas."

"I'm quite pleased," said an older civilian, who is known as a critic of Saigon planning. "We're beginning to get the benefits Komer talked about—military transport and supplies and that sort of stuff plus our ideas. A general I know said the other day he wasn't sure who had taken over whom in this thing."